Chapter 2:

Setting Up and Holding Meetings

Meetings are an integral part of establishing and maintaining a focus area to conserve wetlands. You will need to use meetings to gather support for your project, to plan your conservation efforts, to make assignments and conduct the work, and to publicize your accomplishments.

Using Meetings to Find Partners

You might hold or attend several different types of meetings in order to find the people who share your interests. Some people may respond to a general announcement to attend a meeting about wetlands. Others will want you to come to them. A good way to do this is to contact local civic groups, fishing and hunting clubs, churches, or other groups and ask if you may make a brief presentation at their next meeting. You should customize your message to meet the interests of the audience or group you are addressing. For example, if you think the wetland you want to conserve helps maintain good water quality in an adjacent fishing hole, showcase this aspect to the local bass fishing club and other area anglers. If the wetland is a popular spot for migratory songbirds, promote this fact to a local Audubon chapter.

It is important to also reach out to members of the public who may not belong to any civic or community group, but who are ready to help with your efforts. Your project may be just the opportunity they are seeking. Community meetings or events that are open to the public are good ways to reach these individuals. Use the events to educate and motivate the public. Invite speakers to discuss local issues affecting the wetland. Have a roundtable discussion during which community members may express their knowledge or concerns about the wetland. You also may conduct the meeting as a potluck supper, barbecue, canoe trip, park or wetland cleanup, benefit concert, or other fun event to increase attendance. Consider having some sort of "entertainment" at the meeting to attract people; then deliver your conservation messages while they are at your event.

Business Meetings

Once you have established at least an initial core of stakeholders that share your interest, you will need to start organizing your efforts and conducting the actual business of conserving wetlands. Meetings are critical for the successful planning and implementation of this work. Encourage participants to attend all the meetings, or at least to send a replacement from their organization if they cannot attend personally. Few things are more frustrating to meeting participants than having to spend time explaining what happened at a previous meeting to a person who was absent.

Meeting locations should be easily accessible and centrally located, preferably near the wetland and close to public transportation. Choose a meeting time that will be convenient to the majority of the people, and then be sure to send summaries of the meetings to those who are interested but cannot attend. Try to find a location that will not charge a fee for the meeting space. Examples include local conservation organization clubhouses, a school or university, a public park or nature center, a community center or church, or the offices of a local business. Even places that usually charge a fee for meeting space may waive the fee if you explain that the project is a nonprofit activity, is open to the public, and benefits the community. If you are forming an entirely new organization, you may want to ask other local, not-for-profit organizations in your area where they hold their meetings.

Tips for Successful Meetings

Meetings of project stakeholders can be effective and useful, or they can be boring and arduous. Following is a list of simple tips for holding successful, efficient meetings:

- Develop an agenda of the topics you want to cover and distribute it to all participants before the meeting.
- Always start and end on time.
- Have refreshments available for participants.
- Distribute a sign-in sheet so you have a record of who attended.
- Have a meeting facilitator, or appoint or elect a leader to *keep the meeting on track.* (Discussions have a tendency to wander off the subject at hand. You need a facilitator or leader who is vigilant about keeping people on task.)
- Take notes or record the meeting with a portable tape recorder.
- Have flip charts and markers available for recording group ideas.
- Give each person the opportunity to speak. Don't let anyone dominate the discussion.
- Always decide what your next steps will be, who will accomplish them, and by when.
- Decide on a date or the criteria to be used for calling your next meeting.
- Distribute a summary of the meeting (including assignments and timetables) to all participants.

These things are not difficult to do, yet they will have a profound effect on the efficiency of your meetings if you apply them vigorously.

The following potential issues should be discussed during the initial planning meetings:

- How much does the community value wetlands? (see Chapter 5)
- Do we need more education about wetland ecology, functions, and values?
- What existing community programs might complement our wetlands conservation efforts (e.g., stream monitoring, etc.)?
- What issues are affecting the wetlands in our community?
- What information already exists about the condition of our wetland?
- How do we want to help conserve the wetlands in our community (educational projects in schools, volunteer monitoring of wetlands, etc.)?
- What is the primary local opposition (if any) to wetland conservation?
- Group members should also brainstorm other issues that are important to them.

Keep in mind that it may take many meetings to address all of the important issues, but keep working at it until you've made it through all the issues that the group thinks are important. It may be useful to develop and circulate a newsletter that summarizes the efforts conducted at and between each meeting.

The Limberlost Experience–Meetings

Limberlost Pilot Focus Area Coordinator Ken Brunswick talks about their meetings:

From the beginning, the Limberlost Pilot Focus Area had a meeting place available at no charge, thanks to one of our sponsors. The Friends of The Limberlost (Friends) agreed to sponsor our project, and because Friends is associated with the Limberlost State Historic Site, we were able to use meeting space at the Site. We continue to meet at this convenient location.

Our first meeting was an introductory meeting where we assessed the feasibility of the project. There was no one person or organization "in charge" of that meeting. Attendees brought to the meeting their individual expertise and the expertise of the groups they represented. When the meeting was completed, we had established a definite goal to restore some of the Limberlost Swamp. We did not develop a formal plan at the first meeting, but people were given some time to think about the project and how well it would fit with the missions of their organizations.

In the beginning, our meetings were sporadic, but very exciting. All who attended were very positive. Sometimes it was difficult to get a word in because of the excitement. We could have used a more orderly, facilitated method, but we were building on each other's excitement, which had its own advantages.

After a short period of time, we did more formal planning, and ACRES Land Trust was actively helping to move the project forward. At that point, however, ACRES realized that the project needed to have a stronger local base in order to be a success. To facilitate this, ACRES decreased its involvement until we established the local footing we needed. After we established ourselves, ACRES rejoined our much stronger local organization.

By early 1993, we were choosing a name and designing a brochure, and within a year we were planning the size and scope of our first land purchase.

Coordinated Resource Management

Coordinated Resource Management (CRM) is a process used for cooperative development of management plans that reflect the needs and desires of citizens in the use of the many resources within a watershed. A document (*Indiana Coordinated Resource Management Guide*) was developed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) that presents a collaborative, non-adversarial approach which local groups can use to reach consensus decisions concerning natural resource issues. This document presents a framework for the development of a planning document that will detail the actions needed to obtain a shared community vision regarding use of the resources within the local watershed.

The CRM process was first introduced to Indiana through a workshop that was conducted for natural resource professionals representing over 17 different agencies from five different states. This workshop formed the foundation from which Indiana's CRM efforts began.

Today there are more than 80 local groups using the CRM process to work on natural resource issues within Indiana. These groups include IWCP focus areas, lake associations, cities, watershed coordinators, etc. Some have truly formed *teams*, working together with trust and support. Others are still working to develop the trust and organization that is required to tackle the tough issues that face them.

The NRCS, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and several state agencies have more than 65 employees trained in the CRM process. Indiana has also developed CRM and watershed planning documents for the Internet. One such document entitled *The Natural Resource Planning Guide for Indiana* was written in matrix form to be used as a quick reference for those involved in natural resource planning. Many planning guides, including the *Indiana Coordinated Resource Management Guide* and the quick reference-planning guide are available on the NRCS web site (http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov/tech_ref/).

Participants in the Indiana workshops have had this to say about the CRM approach:

"Best way to get all players together to go through a structured process to achieve win-win."
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

"CRM concept is excellent. The time taken from my business was worth the time spent."
- County Councilman and local Watershed Steering Committee Member

"The process allows everyone to express their views on equal ground and to come up with a solution that will benefit everyone to some degree."
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources

"Only way to get broad involvement of all stakeholders in watershed with conflicting needs."
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

Many different groups are using CRM to develop voluntary, comprehensive plans which consider all natural resources in the area, including the social and economic conditions. These plans follow an established process that assists local citizens in identifying problems and opportunities, and in finding workable, mutually agreeable solutions through consensus building. Watershed plans result in a description of natural resource conservation problems, and they also identify sources of technical, educational, and funding assistance for implementing solutions.

For more information on Indiana Coordinated Resource Management, contact:

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http://www.in.nrcs.usda.gov (click on Technical References for CRM information)